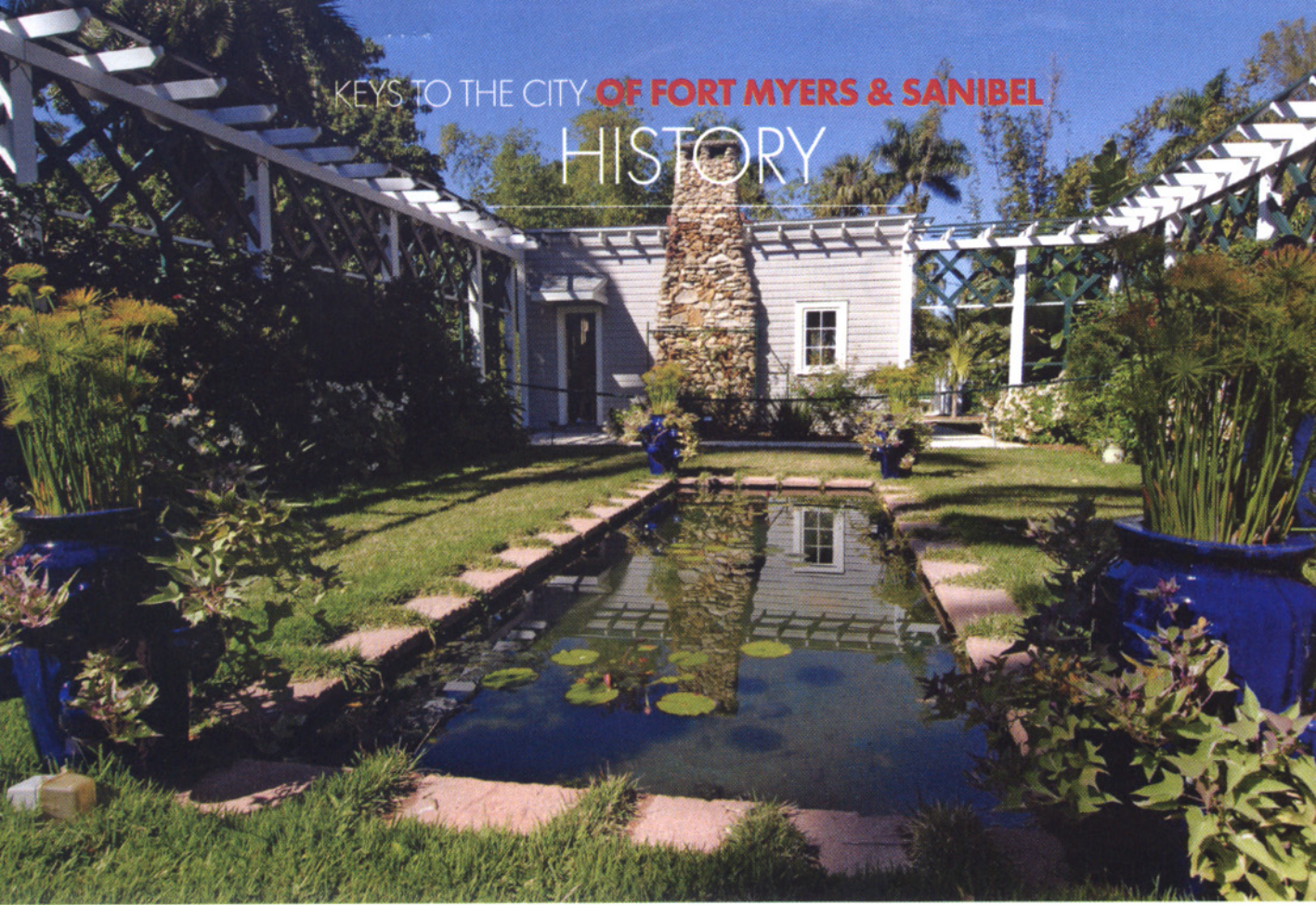


KEYS TO THE CITY **OF FORT MYERS & SANIBEL** HISTORY



Edison & Ford Winter Estates: **Of Gardens and Genius**

BY CHELLE KOSTER WALTON

Boating down the Caloosahatchee River in 1885, Thomas A. Edison spotted a stand of bamboo on the banks. His Florida-wide search was over! He had found exactly the spot where he wanted to build the winter home that doctors had prescribed to improve his health. While the bamboo would work well in his experiments to perfect light-bulb filament, the location would improve his constitution, adding another 46 years to his life.

Edison and his new wife, Mina, brought electricity to their new home in the raucous cow town where cattle stampeded right through their property. They also planted the trademark Royal Palms along McGregor Boulevard, earning the city's nickname City of Palms.

Before long, his fellow inventors and friends Harvey Firestone and Henry Ford began visit-

ing Fort Myers. The Fords eventually bought the home next to Edison's house, which also boasted experimental gardens and a chemical laboratory. Mina Edison commissioned her stylish Moonlight Garden, designed by vogue New York landscape architect Ellen Biddle Shipman, and the Fords planted citrus and mango trees.

Today the homes and gardens have been preserved and restored to period styles. A museum exhibits many of Edison's 1,093 inventions and a 1916 prototype Model T that Ford gave him. Between the two homes, a Friendship Gate opens along a path crossed often by the two Industrial Revolution leaders, geniuses who found inspiration and the simple joys of gardening in Fort Myers.

Edison & Ford Winter Estates, 2350 McGregor Blvd., Fort Myers, 239-334-7419, efwefla.org



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